CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM PLAN

1992

Yukon
Renewable Resources

TR-92-6

104-02552/

CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM PLAN

PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION BRANCH

FINAL REPORT

JUNE, 1992

Yukon
Renewable Resources

TR-92-6

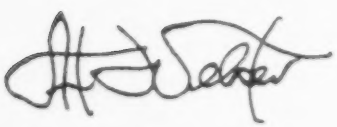
Message From the Minister

This is one of four system plans developed by the Department of Renewable Resources to guide the creation of a Yukon parks system into the next century. The plans follow the Yukon Conservation Strategy and the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Policy approved by Cabinet in 1991.

They are a way of protecting the Yukon's environment while enhancing its recreation potential and they represent the government's commitment to cooperative management of Yukon's natural, cultural and recreational resources.

I would especially like to extend my appreciation to representatives of public interest groups who participated in the plan's development. They provided the broad perspective needed to ensure the plans address the concerns of all Yukon people.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System Plan will protect significant Yukon rivers through a cooperative program with the Department of Indian and Northern Development and Yukon's First Nations.



Art Webster
Minister of Renewable Resources

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

1. INTRODUCTION 1

    1.1 Goal

    1.2 Objectives

    1.3 Principles

2. PROCESS FOR RIVER DESIGNATION 3

3. GUIDELINES FOR RIVER SELECTION 4

    3.1 Principles

    3.2 Heritage Value Guidelines

        3.2.1 Natural Heritage Values

        3.2.2 Human Heritage Values

        3.2.3 Recreational Values

    3.3 Integrity Guidelines

4. MANAGEMENT PLANS 7

5. MONITORING CHR STATUS 8

6. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION 8

    6.1 Results

YUKON/CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM PLAN

1.0 Introduction

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is a cooperative program between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. The Yukon Government has been a co-partner with DIAND since the inception of the program in 1984.

1.1 Goal

The goal of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System is to recognize and manage nationally significant rivers for their natural, human, and recreational heritage values.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System are to give national recognition to the important rivers of Canada and to ensure their future management such that:

- the natural heritage which they represent is conserved and interpreted.

- the human heritage which they represent is conserved and interpreted.

- the opportunities they possess for recreational and heritage appreciation are realized by residents of, and visitors to Canada.

1.3 Principles

The Canadian Heritage River system was created and operates in accordance with the following principles:

- The system is a cooperative one in which federal, provincial and territorial governments, participate in the establishment and administration of the system, retain their traditional jurisdictional powers, including ownership of land, the choice to nominate a river to the system, and the right to continue to operate and manage designated rivers in accordance with the objectives of the system.

- The Canadian Parks Service participates in and encourages the establishment, growth and public awareness of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. The Canadian Parks Service may also financially assist nomination agencies in undertaking studies and preparing plans related to the nomination and/or management of rivers proposed for inclusion in the system.

- Each river included within the system is jointly designated as a "Canadian Heritage River" by the minister responsible for the Canadian Parks Service and the appropriate minister(s) from the government with the jurisdiction over the river, upon the advice of the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board.

- It is a one-category system, "Canadian Heritage Rivers", with no classifications or categories. There are three values recognized in the selection of rivers for the system, which reflect its objectives as follows:

  natural heritage of outstanding Canadian value, human heritage of outstanding Canadian value, the provision of recreational opportunities of outstanding Canadian value

- A river which is outstanding for any one value may qualify for designation.

- The management of Canadian Heritage Rivers will address the conservation and interpretation of natural and human heritage and the realization of recreational opportunities in keeping with the objectives of the system.

- It is recognized that certain rivers, which may be worthy of consideration, form international boundaries or flow through both Canada and the United States. When the nomination of the Canadian portion of such a river to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System is being considered, appropriate consultations with the United States agencies should take place in order to promote maximum cooperation between agencies in the two countries to achieve the objectives of the system.

2.0 PROCESS FOR THE DESIGNATION OF CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS

The process for the designation of Canadian Heritage Rivers will follow a process which includes the following general steps:

- The Yukon Government and DIAND will carry out or coordinate research and analysis to determine if a particular river is worthy of nomination to the C.H.R.S.

- Following consultation with the Council for Yukon Indians, the affected First Nation, and the Yukon public, the Yukon Government and DIAND will nominate a river which they wish to have considered for inclusion in the system, through submission to the board of a completed nomination document. This document should contain all the information necessary to demonstrate that the river is of "outstanding Canadian value".

- The C.H.R. Board will review the nomination document to determine if the nominated river meets the spirit of the selection guidelines and will accordingly recommend to the ministers responsible for the Canadian Parks Service, DIAND and the Yukon Government, either that the nomination be accepted or that the submissions be returned.

- The Yukon Government and DIAND, as the managing agencies, may choose to lodge a river management plan either at the time of nomination or, if the nomination is accepted, at a later time, within three years, indicating how the river's "Outstanding Canadian values" are to be conserved and managed.

- Once the respective ministers accept a nominated river and for which a management plan has been lodged, it will be designated a Canadian Heritage River jointly by the ministers responsible for the Canadian Parks Service, DIAND and the Yukon Government.

- A river whose nomination is accepted, but for which a management plan is not lodged at the time of nomination, will be placed in a registry of Canadian Heritage Rivers.

- Upon receipt by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board of a management plan for a candidate Canadian Heritage River, the minister responsible for the Canadian Parks Service, DIAND and the Yukon Government will formally designate the river as a Canadian Heritage River.

- Public announcement of the nomination and designation of Canadian Heritage Rivers will be made jointly by the ministers responsible for the Canadian parks Service, DIAND and the Yukon Government.

3.0 GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System provides a vehicle for the recognition and conservation of those rivers deemed to be of outstanding Canadian Heritage value. This value is obtained when it has been determined that a river is an outstanding representative of, or unique in the Yukon. By the inclusion of such rivers in a single coast-to-coast system, they become representative of Canada's river heritage as a whole, thus reflecting a "Canadian value".

3.1 PRINCIPLES

- The outstanding value of Canadian Heritage Rivers shall be determined according to three sets of "Heritage Value Guidelines":

  guidelines for natural heritage value.
  guidelines for human heritage value, and
  guidelines for recreational value.

- A nominated river shall be included in the system if it meets one or more of the heritage value guidelines as well as a set of integrity guidelines.

- While no formal limit is placed on the number of potential rivers in the system, the purpose of the system is not to provide for the conservation of all rivers of interest, importance or value, but only for those most outstanding of these from a Canadian viewpoint.

- Should a Canadian Heritage River have deteriorated to such an extent that it has lost those characteristics for which it was originally designated or when further research has shown that the river is not, in fact, of outstanding Canadian value, that river shall be deleted from the system.

3.2 HERITAGE VALUE GUIDELINES

3.2.1 Natural Heritage Values

Outstanding Canadian natural heritage value will be recognized when a river environment meets one or more of the following guidelines:

- It is an outstanding example of river environments as they are affected by the major stages and processes in the earth's evolutionary history which are represented in Canada. This would include rivers which best represent the major periods of geological time in which the surface of the earth underwent major changes and stream modifications.

- Is an outstanding representation of significant ongoing fluvial, geomorphological and biological processes. As distinct for the periods of the earth's development, this focuses upon ongoing processes in the evolution and form of the river and its associated plant and animal communities.

- Contains along its course, unique, rare or outstanding examples of natural phenomena, formations or features, or areas of exceptional natural beauty.

- Contains, along its course, habitats of rare or endangered species of animals and plants. This would also include areas of where outstanding concentrations of plants and animals of Canadian interest and significance are found.

3.2.2 Human Heritage Values

Outstanding human heritage value will be recognized when a river environment meets one or more of the following guidelines:

- Is of outstanding importance owing to its influence, over a period of time, on the historical development of Canada through a major impact upon the region in which the river is located or beyond; this would include the rivers influence on the Yukon First Nations and non-aboriginal significant historical themes such as settlement patterns and transportation.

- Is strongly associated with persons, events, movements, achievements, ideas, or beliefs of Canadian significance.

- Contains outstanding examples or concentrations of historical or archaeological structures works or sites which are unique, rare, or of great antiquity.

- Contains outstanding examples or concentrations of historical or archaeological structures, works or sites which are representative of major themes in Canadian history.

In every case, consideration will be given to the state of preservation of the river environment relative to its visual appearance during the historic period in which the waterway is considered to be of outstanding importance.

3.2.3 Recreational Values

Recognizing a man-land relationship essential to recreation, outstanding recreational value will be recognized when a river environment meets the following general guidelines:

- Possesses an appropriate combination of recreational opportunities and related natural values, which together, provide a capability for outstanding recreational experience.

- Recreational opportunities include such activities as boating, hiking, camping, wildlife viewing, and human heritage appreciation.

- Natural values include natural visual aesthetics, that is, diversity and quality of scenic beauty and physical essentials, such as sufficient flow, navigability, rapids, accessibility and suitable shoreline.

- Be capable of supporting recreational uses without significant loss of or impact on its natural, historical or aesthetic values.

3.3 INTEGRITY GUIDELINES

In addition to specific "Heritage Value Guidelines", a river and its environment must meet "Integrity Guidelines" for designation to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System:

- They should be of sufficient size and contain all or most of the key interrelated and interdependent elements to demonstrate the key aspects of processes, features, activities or other phenomena which give the river its outstanding value.

- They should contain those ecosystem components required for the continuity of the species, features or objects to be protected or recognized.

- The quality of the water should be such as to provide for the continuity and/or improvement of the resources upon which "value" to the system has been determined.

4. MANAGEMENT PLANS

Before formal designation to the C.H.R.S., the Yukon Government and DIAND will jointly lodge a management plan with the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board. This plan will be prepared and approved by the Yukon Government and DIAND in consultation with the Council for Yukon Indians and the affected Yukon First Nation.

The specific content of the management plan will be the prerogative of DIAND and the Yukon Government and will not be approved or disapproved by the board.

The management plan will establish the boundaries of the river management area which is to be included in the C.H.R.S. and will set out the policies and practices to be followed by DIAND and the Yukon Government to ensure the river's development, management and use are consistent with the objectives of the system.

The plan should be brief and should demonstrate the commitment on the part of DIAND and the Yukon Government to protect the river's heritage values.

5.0 MONITORING THE STATUS OF CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS

In order to ensure that all Canadian Heritage Rivers continue to possess the outstanding heritage values for which they were originally designated and thus continue to merit this designation, DIAND and the Yukon Government will prepare and submit to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board an annual report on the status of the rivers resources.

In the preparation of the annual report the significant heritage values for which the river was designated will be monitored.

If a river no longer meets the "Guidelines for the Selection of Canadian Heritage Rivers", DIAND and the Yukon Government will request the board to de-designate the river.

6.0 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the "Guidelines for the Selection of Canadian Heritage Rivers", 77 Yukon rivers were evaluated within a Yukon Heritage Rivers System Study commenced in 1986 and completed in 1988.

In the spring of 1986, a preliminary stage of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System: Yukon System Plan was completed. That project studied 77 Yukon rivers and rated their potential contribution towards the C.H.R.S. by assigning numerical values (on a scale of 1-10) in given theme areas (natural heritage, human heritages and recreation).

Analysis of the values led to the conclusion that 36 of the 77 rivers should be further studied. The study also acknowledged a significant lack of information pertaining to native history and, to a lesser degree, recreation history on some rivers. A second stage of the system planing study was completed which addressed those information gaps as they applied to the remaining 36 rivers. In this second study, rivers were ranked on a high, moderate, or low scale in respect to their heritage themes. Special attention was paid to the previously unranked native history and recreational values.

To maintain the representative nature of the system, the rivers were categorized into six geographic regions: South West, Central Lowland, South East, Eastern Mountain, Northern Lowland, And North Coast.

Additional data was considered to be of value in assessing rivers for their potential contribution to a comprehensive and representative heritage river system. These factors were:

1. Navigability;
2. Accessibility; and
3. Morphology.

A final assessment was completed to establish the river's potential for maintaining its suitability as a Canadian Heritage River under the "Integrity Guidelines". Assessing the integrity of a river corridor was a two step process. First the relationship of existing and potential land use activities to each of the resource components which warranted the river's consideration was assessed (Land Use Compatibility). Secondly, the size of the area and the ecological inter-relationship of the resources was assessed. Together, these assessments determined the extent to which each river corridor could sustain the important resource qualities for which it was identified.

6.1 Results

In addition to the value of the theme rankings, priorities among the rivers recommended for nomination, have been established considering the ease of designation and the perceived threat to the theme value and the integrity of the resources of the river corridor that have contributed to its recommendation for nomination. The rankings listed below are individually discussed briefly, indicating the rationale for their priority assessment in light of considerations identified:

1. Alsek River
2. Firth River
3. Yukon River
4. Tatshenshini River
5. Bonnet Plume River
6. Porcupine River
7. Big Salmon

1. Alsek:

The Alsek has exceptionally high natural theme values and is a worthy candidate for the C.H.R.S. Indeed, its previous nomination is well justified and, due to its previous designation, has been included as number 1.

2. Firth:

Of comparable natural theme values to the Alsek, the Firth has protection within the North Yukon National Park, making its land management totally consistent with the objectives of the system. Its nomination to the C.H.R.S. would be already facilitated by such status.

3. Yukon

The Yukon River, consistent with other rivers in this first priority group, has exceptionally high theme values. The Yukon River has been assigned such a high priority because of the importance of dealing with the management of land uses along the corridor.

4. Tatshenshini:

The Tatshenshini has extremely high values in all theme areas. Existing use of the river corridor has already brought international recognition to the area from its wilderness and white water rafting potential. Potential mining development along the river is also a major concern. There is a significant potential for the resources of the corridor to be diminished if active and appropriate management strategies are not implemented. This exceptionally high heritage value, combined with a very real threat for the river's integrity, cause the Tatshenshini to be ranked as a high priority.

5. Bonnet Plume:

The Bonnet Plume is ranked highly because of its contribution to greater regional representation. It has high values and little immediate threat.

6. Porcupine

The Porcupine similarly ranks ahead of the Big Salmon for its contribution to regional representation within the system. With high theme values, and little to no potential threat to its integrity, the Porcupine does have potentially more committed land use than the Bonnet Plume and, as a result, may be less readily accepted as a C.H.R.S. nomination.

7. Big Salmon:

Although the Big Salmon has high value as a recreational river with the C.H.R.S., it is overshadowed in the priority listing by the Yukon River, which ranks more highly in the same theme areas and is in the same geographic region.